

THE POWER OF ROOTS

15th in a Series on Ephesians called, "Messages to the Misfits"

Ephesians 3:14-19 – Topic: How to Be Filled

I was thinking about weddings recently after performing one. They are momentous events. They must be, because we do things for weddings we would not normally do. For our wedding I wore a velvet tuxedo. In August. I would have worn such a thing for no other reason. Laurie did what most women do. She wore the most expensive dress she has ever owned. It was ridiculously costly and she wore it a sum total of one time. She still has that dress 40 years later. Do you know how many dresses she currently has that are 40 years old? Let's see, there's, uh, one... and, uh, there's...no, there are no others. There's a total of one. Why is that dress still hanging in her closet? Well, you know how fashion runs in cycles. Hey, I see that some people are trying to bring back the shoulder pad style for women. Maybe she's waiting for that dress to become a hot new style. Or maybe she's thinking you never can tell when you're going to need a wedding gown. No, none of those are the reason for keeping that dress. She has it because it is a nostalgic reminder of the most momentous day of her life. Why do we do outrageous things pertaining to a wedding day? It is because that event is so enormously important. On that day two people tell each other they will love each other for the rest of their lives. Nothing else comes close to the impact of that one commitment. It is life changing to have a person tell you that he or she chooses you over all the other people on the planet and will love you as long as they live.

Being loved is revolutionary. Nothing has as much power as being loved. The night before we got engaged Laurie and I decided that there was no future for our relationship and that we needed to go our separate ways. I remember the deep sadness I felt, the pain of that, because I loved Laurie deeply. That one loss colored everything else in my life. The next day the most shocking and unexpected thing happened. Instead of going our separate ways, we decided to make a future for us. Laurie agreed to marry me. I recall the exact opposite of the sadness of the night before. Instead of sadness, there was joy that filled every part of my being and every part of my life. Nothing in life has had the impact of being loved by Laurie, of having her say and live out for 40 years that I mean more to her than anything else in the world.

That tells us something about the power of love. Before his untimely death, actor Philip Seymour Hoffman said, "Ultimately what gets you up in the morning is to be loved." He said that is the driving motivation in our lives. It turns out that love is a powerful force in making us what we want to be and making life be what we want it to be, but it is love that comes from an unexpected source. We will see that in Ephesians 3:14-19.

THE GOAL IS FOR US TO BE FILLED UP

This passage is loaded with powerful ideas. In it we see Paul praying for the Ephesian Christians. He prays about what they most need as they face a hostile environment in which they are outsiders. They were struggling with how to keep going in a tough circumstance where they faced ostracism, opposition, and even persecution. The things he prays are the things that would enable them to thrive even in that difficult environment.

We need to grasp what Paul said here because we all face various trials. When I compare what our culture is now with where it was when Laurie and I got married I see breathtaking, dramatic change. And it has not been for the good. Our culture is like a snowball rolling down a hill. It is gathering momentum, going faster and faster as it plunges ever lower. Living in our culture is producing more and more challenges for followers of Jesus, and that will continue.

There are trials at a personal level. Our efforts to live in God's truth will be opposed at every turn, and trying to obey God will be hard, a constant battle against the tide. We will face dismaying and discouraging hardships and setbacks in a myriad of forms. People might come into our lives who cause us frustration or hurt, we might have financial struggles, our health might fail us, we could face relational problems with spouses or family. There is no end to the trials we might encounter. Our trials may not compare with the degree of difficulty of difficulties faced by those first century Christians, but that doesn't help much. They're still hard for us. This prayer of Paul's is for you. It has what you need, what we all need, as we deal with life in a fallen world run by Satan, where we have personal trials and failures dogging us.

The ultimate outcome Paul was praying for his readers can be seen at the end of verse 19. He prays a number of things in this passage, but at the end of it all is "that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Literally Paul wrote, "that you may be filled to all the fullness of God." That raises the question of what it means to be filled to all the fullness of God.

What does it mean when something is full? Suppose you are going to take a bath, so you turn the faucet of your bathtub on and the water starts flowing into the tub. But it will take a while to fill. As it is running you get an important phone call. The person who has called needs you to locate and provide some information. So you set about doing that, sort of forgetting about the water running in the tub. You are so distracted that it is only when the phone call is over that you realize the water is still running. You dash into the bathroom and find to your dismay that water is now running over the edge of the tub and spilling onto the floor, making a huge mess, so you turn it off. The tub is full, meaning it can take no more water. That is what it means to be full.

So God is filled to the brim, so full you could cram no more in. But what is he full of? God is complete, so complete that he needs nothing. In himself he is full. He is full of love, holiness, goodness, peace, joy, life and power. If he lacked any level of love, he would not be full. If he lacked some holiness or goodness, he certainly would not be complete and satisfied. If he lacked peace or joy he would not be full. And if he lacked power he would definitely not be complete, he would be unable to do what he purposed to do and that would drain him of peace and joy.

And these are things that we see the Scripture says are true of God. 1 John 4:8 tells us that God is love. He is the very meaning of it. In Isaiah 6 the prophet was given a glimpse of the throne of God, and he saw angels proclaiming, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." God is holy and he is Almighty, meaning he has all power. Psalm 34:8 says "Taste and see that the Lord is good." Romans 15:33 says he is the "God of peace," and Isaiah 9:6-7 says he is the prince of

peace. Psalm 16:9 says there is fullness of joy in God's presence, and Nehemiah 8:10 says the joy of the Lord is our strength.

How do you envision God? Do you see him as an ominous authority figure, a threat most of the time, kind of frowning and unhappy with us because we are so irritating? Do you think he's like that grumpy old man who yells at kids telling them to get off his lawn? In his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, the late Dallas Willard wrote, "We should, to begin with, think that God leads a very interesting life, and that he is full of joy. Undoubtedly, he is the most joyous being in the universe...All the good and beautiful things from which we occasionally drink tiny droplets of soul-exhilarating joy, God continuously experiences in all their breadth and depth and richness." God is the most joyful being in existence. It is not possible to be more joyful than he is because he has no fear and he has no disappointment. He is filled with joy, as well as love, life, peace, holiness, goodness and power.

For us to be filled with the fullness of God then is to be filled with those same things. It is to be full of holiness and goodness because they are essential to health and true freedom, and necessary to become a radiant, enthusiastic person. To be filled to the fullness of God is to be full of love, peace and joy, and never be frustrated, since we have all the power we need. That sounds very appealing, doesn't it? That's what Paul prayed that we would have along with the Ephesian Christians. Those early believers would have been able to handle anything that came their way if they were filled to the fullness of God, and so would we. They would continue to be good, holy, at peace, loving and joyful in every circumstance. But in this passage you will see that he prayed several things that would result in us being filled with the fullness of God.

Paul typically dictated his letters. If you listen to people in normal conversation and analyze what they say you will discover that they often speak in ways that are not grammatically correct. You will hear fragments of sentences and run on sentences, especially if they are excited about something. When Paul prayed he sometimes got totally into what he was praying, with the result that occasionally he produced long, complicated sentences. This passage is one of them. There is some complex grammar here that causes debate about how all the clauses relate to one another. We get that Paul bows before God, who is the source of every family, every person and he makes requests of him. I believe that Paul prayed 2 main things that are introduced in the Greek text by the word *hina*, which means "that" or "so that." Where it gets confusing is that the first thing he prays he kind of restates in a parallel way. So you get one thing he prays, then that is restated, then you get the second thing he prayed. I'll point out what I mean as we go through. So we can see what leads to us being filled with the fullness of God.

WE NEED TO BE STRENGTHENED BY THE SPIRIT

Paul first prays that we would be strengthened by God's Spirit. It is common to see the Holy Spirit as the source of power in the Bible. In Acts 1:8 Jesus promised his disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." Micah 3:8 says, "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord." To have the Holy Spirit filling us is to be filled with power.

We know that in the early church being empowered by the Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to do miraculous things. So that's what people often think of when they hear about being strengthened by the Holy Spirit. He will give us the power to do spectacular, miraculous deeds. But that was not what Paul had in mind.

He prayed that we would be strengthened **“in the inner being.”** He knows that what we most need is strength inside, strength of heart and character. This is not about doing some powerful deed outside of us. It has to do with having the power in our inner being that will enable us to do what we need to do without compromising or giving up.

Power has to do with control. The person who has power in a society has the ability to control things in that society. When we think about power that is typically what we think about. We want to have power so we can exert control over people and circumstances around us. We recently were trying to arrange a loan through our bank and they denied us. I was frustrated because I knew they were not doing their due diligence to understand our situation, but I did not have the power to fix the problem. I felt powerless, and didn't like it. So we tend to think of the Holy Spirit giving us power to exert influence and control over things outside of us.

But that was not what Paul prayed. What do we most need to control? Though we wish we had the power to control other people, I guarantee you that would be a nightmare. Fortunately, we do not have that kind of power. **What we most need to control is ourselves.**

One thing I like about the Bible is that it deals with the real world. In the real world, Jesus said, we will have trouble. We can't control that. God's people are going to have as much trouble as anyone else, and actually more because we are outsiders here.

Recently I was walking around our bed and I wasn't paying a lot of attention because navigating around our bedroom is neither a foreign nor a difficult task. But apparently I should have paid more attention than I did, because without realizing what I was doing I cut a corner too sharply and consequently banged my foot against the post of the bed. In other words, I stubbed my toe. Man, did that hurt. Because I try to be careful with the words I use, I wasn't able to effectively employ what researchers claim is the best treatment for a stubbed toe. Studies have shown that swearing is about the best thing you can do to help with the pain. It turns out that stubbing your toe is intensely painful because your toes are packed with nerves that send a loud pain signal up to the brain.

But Psalm 91:11-12 says of God, “He will command the angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” Hey, where were the angels that day? A lawyer might say, “You need to read the provisions of that contract carefully. It says you will not strike your foot against a stone. You didn't. You struck it against a bedpost, not a stone, and there is no bedpost clause in that promise.” Obviously that Psalm was poetic. It was not literally promising God's people that they would never stub their toes. It was promising that God would watch over them and protect them.

We'd like that to mean that nothing bad will ever happen to us. But the Bible talks at length about how we should regard it when we encounter trials. It says we should not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come upon us. It says we groan in this world as we await the coming of the Lord Jesus. In other words, we are going to have hardships and pains.

What we want is to have power to keep hard trials from happening or at least to make them go away if they come, but what Paul is praying is that we will have power to stand firm no matter what trials happen. There is common wisdom that says it is not what happens to you that is important, but how you respond to what happens to you. That is absolutely true. We do not have the power to control our environment so that nothing bad ever happens to us. Hard things will be a part of all our lives. There is one thing we have the chance to control no matter what happens, good or bad. That one thing is ourselves. It turns out that controlling ourselves is the most important thing we can do.

We have all seen situations where two people experience similar difficult things, and one responds with bitterness, anger, and self-pity, while the other is gracious, at peace, and grows stronger because of it. What is the difference? It is what is inside of them. It is that strength inside that is the most important thing we can have. And Paul prayed that we would be given that strength by the Holy Spirit.

How does the Holy Spirit strengthen us? There are several ways. One is through the Word of God. Laurie and I went through a tough time last year because something we care deeply about we had been praying for years, but God had not answered those prayers. I have mentioned before that Michael and Carissa had been trying to start a family for quite some time. Their last hope was to try in vitro fertilization. It did not go well. In fact, it went about as badly as it could. It led to a dangerous situation for Carissa that her doctor said he had only seen one other time in 20 years of practice. It was a really sad time for us. God seemed not to be listening to our prayers and we were hurting so badly for them. During that time Laurie's mind landed on a verse of Scripture. In John 11:40 Jesus told the sisters of Lazarus as they were grieving their now deceased brother, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" We both hung onto that verse. It gave us some hope. It strengthened us to continue trusting God. We didn't know what the glory of God would look like. Honestly, at that point I had a hard time imagining how God could bring glory out of the situation. I didn't know what it would look like, but the word of God gave us strength. We were shocked to learn that weeks after that disaster, God showed his glory and Carissa became pregnant.

Another way the Spirit strengthens us is through people. When they encourage us, or support us, or help us, or when they give us a godly example to follow, we are strengthened. But there is also a way the Spirit strengthens us that cannot be defined in human terms. ***He simply gives us strength that we would not otherwise have had to keep going, to stay faithful, to respond to injustice and unkindness with love and grace, to trust God and remain hopeful in the middle of hardship and disappointment.*** He is there giving us something that we would not have had without him.

WE NEED TO HAVE CHRIST LIVING IN OUR HEARTS

In our translation verse 17 reads “So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” How is it that being strengthened will enable us to have Christ dwelling in our hearts? That is a bit confusing. Fortunately, the text helps us here. This is another case where translators have confused the issue rather than clear it up. The text of verses 16-17 literally says, “That he might give you according to the riches of his glory power to be strengthened through his Spirit in the inner man; to have Christ dwell through faith in your hearts.” That second phrase is not dependent on the first, it is parallel to it. It is not a result. I believe that Paul was saying the same thing in a different way.

In other words, another way to talk about being strengthened in the inner person is to have Christ dwell in your heart through faith. But wait, if we’re believers in Jesus doesn’t he already live in us? Yes, he does. Romans 8:9-10 tell us we have the Spirit of Christ in us. What then is Paul talking about? Surely since he was writing to believers in Jesus he wasn’t referring to Jesus coming into them through faith, because he taught Jesus was already there.

There was a perfectly good Greek word that Paul could have used to express that he wanted Christ to dwell in their hearts, but he used a different word. The word he used was used in Luke 11:26 to refer to demons entering a person and taking up residence there. It meant a lot more than just rent a room in that person’s heart. It meant the demon was actually possessing that person, exerting control over them.

Laurie and I have had a number of people live with us through the years. For instance, you might remember Micah who lived at our house for some time. He lived there, but he did not possess our house. He didn’t decide to remodel our kitchen or paint the walls a new color more pleasing to him. But we possess our house, meaning we decide what happens there. We decided to put in new kitchen counters and new flooring in the house. That’s the difference between living in a place and possessing it. That is what Paul intended here. His prayer was that Christ would not just be in them, but would possess them, begin to exert control over them. He was praying that Christ’s presence would be pervasive in their lives and exert his influence over everything they thought, felt, said and did.

So the question is this: did Jesus ever face anything hard, painful or discouraging when he walked this planet? Are you serious right now? His life was grueling. Even the parts we don’t know much about would not have been easy. He was a member of a poor family that was part of an oppressed people group that has always faced prejudice. His own parentage would have been questioned by people. Then when he began his ministry he faced relentless opposition. He knew long before it finally happened that the most influential people in his culture were plotting to have him killed. He dealt on a daily basis with opposition and with friends who seemed incapable of getting what he was teaching them. This on top of the usual hardships of life that we all face. When you see him live in that difficult environment you see him never wavering, always steadfast, always focused on his goal, never impatient, never disgusted with people and their foibles. If Christ is

possessing us, increasingly taking over our lives, what will we be like? ***We will handle the hardships and disappointments and tragedies of life the way he did. Increasingly we will look like Jesus, not in our appearance, but in the way we live.***

WE NEED TO BE ROOTED IN GOD'S LOVE

The second thing Paul prayed for people was that they be, “rooted and established in love” so that they might “grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.” Paul prayed that people would be solidly rooted in the truth that God loved them.

Just outside the fence at the back of our backyard there is a slope down to the houses below us. That slope doesn't belong to us. It belongs to our homeowner's association. Many years ago they had planted a eucalyptus tree on the slope not far from that fence. Over the years that tree had grown dramatically. It became enormous. It got so tall and its branches were so wide that when there was a strong wind one of the branches would actually bang on the roof at the corner of our house. We communicated to our HOA that this was not a good situation, but they did nothing. So I tried again. I wrote a letter. I pointed out that eucalyptus trees tend not to have very deep and strong root systems. I also pointed out in the letter that this tree was planted on a slope. I said that when we got a series of powerful winter storms the ground would get saturated. Shallow roots, wet ground on slope combined with a strong wind would mean there was a real possibility of that tree being blown down. I also reminded them that often when we get big storms with lots of rain, the wind will come from the south, which would mean if it knocked that tree down, it was going to land on our house. So, I concluded, if that happened, the HOA would be responsible for all damages to our property and any possible injuries we sustained as a result. A few weeks later they had that tree cut down because they knew all I had described could happen.

Roots are what sustain a tree, make it healthy and enable it to be stable and withstand the worst of storms. Shallow roots on wet, sloped ground are trouble for a big tree. Paul pictured us being trees, firmly rooted. We need those roots to be healthy, strong, stable and able to withstand whatever storms life may send our way. The place we most need to be deeply rooted, is in the love of God.

Paul's prayer was that we would be so powerfully rooted in God's love that we wouldn't just intellectually know it, but that we would actually experience God's love in a way that surpassed merely knowing about something. In other words, he wanted more for us than to just be aware of the fact that God loves us. He wanted us to actually feel it, to experience it at our core, for it to be the foundation of our lives, the very soil from which we grow and live.

In his book, *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ*, the late Martyn Lloyd Jones wrote, “It is love alone which can give us real power to live the Christian life... There is nothing in this world that so energizes us as love.”

Do you know how powerful it is to feel loved? We had our granddaughters with us last night so Mama and “Dadden” could go to the Padre game. This morning Ella was looking forward to going to Nana’s church. Be clear, in her mind it is *Nana’s* church. I was going to leave before them. Unprovoked, she came to me hugged my leg tightly and said, “Oh, I love you, Yapaw.” I have a hard time thinking of something that approaches the power of that. The only thing that comes to mind is being loved by my wife.

That’s because being loved is an overpowering experience. It is the most important element in bringing health, wholeness and joy to the human soul. Without love, there is no joy, no health, and really there is no life. But with love, there is joy, happiness, health and strength. Being loved is the biggest, most important thing that can ever happen to us.

Little Ella also provides us with a warning, however. She is a precocious and delightful child who thrives on relationships. But there will be times when in a moment everything can change. It could be something as small and unexpected as it’s time for bed and you want her to put her PJ’s on and won’t let her wear her Rapunzel T-shirt to bed. That could provoke a reaction that is as small as the lower lip pout starting, with her going and sitting in a corner and feeling unhappy and sorry for herself, or it could be as big as weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. Suddenly she is certain that you don’t love her, that you are, in fact, mean, and that she most definitely does not love you. We do the same thing with God. Life takes a brutal turn, and we don’t just question God’s love for us, we are certain that he cannot possibly love us, that he is being cruel to us. So why would we ever love and trust him?

Paul’s prayer is that we would know God’s love in a way that it surpasses knowledge. In other words, nothing would ever shake our confidence, our experience of God’s love. It would be so powerful that we would know he loves us even when we cannot understand what was happening to us.

We need to experience the height, depth, width and length of God’s love. It extends to infinity in every direction even when we may not see it in our circumstances. Paul knew what he wrote about. He had worse circumstances than any of us have ever experienced or ever will, yet he was rooted in the truth that God loved him. He knew that despite the fact that, as we saw a few weeks ago, he was as bad as it was possible to be, he had fought against God and had seriously injured and even killed God’s people, God loved him. Not even the worst actions imaginable kept God from loving Paul.

The cross of Christ is the measure of God’s love. It is the proof of it. Suppose Laurie suddenly announced that she deeply wanted to go to the ballet with me, that she wanted that more than anything. I am going to reveal one of my cultural deficits here, and I’ll probably get someone mad at me for this, but I’d rather go to the dentist than go to the ballet. And I hate going to the dentist. The dentist visit will last less than an hour, but the ballet might last 2, and for me be more painful. So imagine the ballet gauntlet has been thrown down by my wife. There is one question now being asked. How much do you love your wife? Are you willing to go with her - and not just go

with her, but refuse to complain and be grumpy about it the whole time? Are you willing to make that sacrifice? If not, can you really claim you love your wife, which means to put her good above yours?

Love can be measured by what you are willing to give up. If you are not willing to sacrifice much for someone, you don't love them much. What God sacrificed for us is immeasurable, and he made that sacrifice for us when we were totally undeserving. We know that the greatest act of love is to die to save another person. Jesus made that sacrifice and infinitely more for us. That's how much he loves us.

The foundation of being filled to the fullness of God is experiencing the love of God. It is being totally rooted in and overwhelmed by God's unconditional love. The most important thing we can do is be deeply rooted in God's love for us.

APPLICATION

ASK GOD TO CHANGE HEARTS MORE THAN CIRCUMSTANCES

Is it wrong to pray about the circumstances people face? No, if we love them it is natural to desire that they get good things in their lives. But we need to think about the bigger picture. Is everything always going to go well and be easy for us and for the people that we love? No, that's not how life works. We are all going to face hardship. This means the determining factor in how full a person's life is, how much they are filled to the fullness of God, is not circumstantial. It is something inside them. In other words, the crucial factor is not what happens to them, but what happens inside them.

We have been going through a stressful time in our family. After longing for years to start a family Michael and Carissa rejoiced at Carissa's pregnancy. But then two weeks ago the doctors became concerned over signs that she was about to go into labor, way too early. We have been praying for the baby would stay in the oven and keep cooking. We should pray that, because God tells us to make our requests to him. But our desire should be that they would be filled to the fullness of God. So we should also pray that they would be strengthened by the Spirit and that they would be rooted in God's love.

ASK GOD FOR YOURSELF

Our natural reaction is to say, "I do want to be filled to the fullness of God. What do I need to do to make that happen? What steps do I need to take?" What actions do you see Paul recommending to the Ephesians? Uh, I don't see any. Right. Paul was asking God to do some things that ***only he can do***. Only he can strengthen us by his Spirit, and root us in his love. So we need to pray for ourselves.

LIVE IN GOD'S LOVE

It is imperative that we live utterly and totally convinced of the truth that God loves us perfectly, thoroughly, unconditionally, unfailingly and eternally. More than anything it is this certainty that God loves us that will bring peace, strength and fullness to us.

Years ago I had a conversation with a godly man whose life serves as a cautionary tale. He had served God in full time ministry all of his adult life. He had been a missionary for years, then returned to the States where he served as a pastor on the staff of a large church for years. He knew the gospel of grace thoroughly and believed it. He knew the cross was all about God's love and shared the grace of God with many people. And then, seemingly out of the blue, his life unraveled. He fell into depression so deep he was unable to function. He had to go on disability because he could not work. This went on for weeks, months, then a year, and in the middle of it he believed he would never recover. He said it was a total breakdown.

What caused this breakdown? He told me that though he never questioned God's existence or the gospel of grace, though he knew that he was forgiven and was in God's kingdom by his grace, though he knew God is love, he never really believed that God liked him. He felt God sort of grudgingly let him into his kingdom and tolerated him. As he result, his years of ministry had been full of frenetic activity driven primarily by an effort to convince God to actually love him. Though he intellectually knew better, in his heart he was striving mightily to get God to actually love him. And it almost destroyed him. He did eventually recover, but relief only began to come when he began to grasp and really believe that God truly loved him. He had to believe that God did not love him because he won enough converts or memorized enough Scripture or worked hard enough or was good enough, but simply because God loves unconditionally. He began to be rooted in the true love of God, and only then did the depression begin to lift. He was an example of the fact that for us to be filled with the fullness of God we absolutely must be thoroughly rooted in God's love for us, to believe with every atom in us, that God loves us, and will never stop loving us.